

Message Text

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14-10

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 TRSE-00 L-02 AGR-05 DOTE-00 DODE-00

IO-10 CG-00 H-02 /049 W

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R 141828Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9643

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB EWWT CS

SUBJECT: PORT OF LIMON SUSPENDS ROLL ON ROLL OFF SERVICE

SUMMARY: TWO POWERFUL LIMON UNIONS, THE ATLANTIC BANANA WORKERS UNION (UTBA) AND THE NATIONAL ATLANTIC RAILROAD SYNDICATE (SFNA), SUCCEEDED IN TEMPORARILY HALTING ROLL ON ROLL OFF SERVICES IN THE PORT OF LIMON. THE STANDSTILL, WHICH BEGAN THE WEEK OF MARCH 3 AND ENDED ON MARCH 13 WAS CAUSED BY THE FAILURE OF THE SHIPPING COMPANIES TO RECOGNIZE DEMANDS MADE BY THE TWO UNIONS AND THE APPARENT FAILURE OF THE PORT AUTHORITY, JAPDEVA, TO TAKE A FIRM STANCE WITH THE UNIONS.

1. THE UTBA AND THE SNFA TOOK ADVANTAGE OF CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS OF ANOTHER LIMON UNION, THE SYNDICATE OF PORT AND RAILROAD WORKERS OF LIMON (STPFL), TO CAUSE A DISRUPTION IN ROLL ON ROLL OFF ACTIVITIES IN THE PORT OF LIMON. THE DISPUTE BEGAN WHEN THE STPFL SAT DOWN TO RE-NEGOTIATE THEIR 1972 CONTRACT WITH THE THREE SHIPPING COMPANIES INVOLVED IN

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ROLL ON ROLL OFF ACTIVITIES, I.E. CARIBBEAN COORDINATED

TRANSPORT (CCT), PANAMERICAN MAIL LINE AND NAVIERA NACIONAL COSTARRICENSE (NANACO LINE).

2. NEITHER UTBA NOR SFNA ARE INVOLVED IN ROLL ON ROLL OFF, RATHER THEY HANDLE BANANAS WHICH ARE NOT CURRENTLY SHIPPED VIA TRAILER. EITHER OUT OF A SENSE OF RIVALRY WITH STPFL, WHICH SEEMED TO BE NEGOTIATING A FAIRLY GOOD CONTRACT, OR OUT OF A FEAR THAT BANANAS MIGHT BE SHIPPED VIA ROLL ON ROLL OFF IN THE FUTURE, OR POSSIBLY FOR BOTH MOTIVES, THE TWO BANANA UNIONS DECIDED TO PRESENT A SERIES OF DEMANDS TO THE SHIPPING COMPANIES AT THE TIME OF THE CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS. THE COMPANIES REBELLED STATING THAT THE SOME 14 DEMANDS PRESENTED WERE EXCESSIVE, E.G. ONE DEMAND CALLED FOR THE COMPANIES TO CREATE A SPECIAL FUND WHICH WOULD BE USED TO INDEMNIFY WORKERS IF AT SOME FUTURE DATE ROLL ON ROLL OFF ACTIVITIES RESULTED IN THE LOSS OF JOBS. THE COMPANIES ALSO POINTED OUT THAT UNDER NEW LADGHGREGULATIONS CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE UNION AND THE STEVEDORE AGENTS AND THE COMPANIES ACTED ONLY AS INTERESTED OBSERVERS.

3. FRUSTRATED IN THEIR ATTEMPTS, UTBA AND SFNA THREATENED VIOLENCE IF ROLL ON ROLL OFF ACTIVITIES CONTINUED AND AT ONE POINT REPORTEDLY STONED THE CCT OFFICE. THE PORT AUTHORITY, JAPDEVA, FEARING THIS TYPE OF DISRUPTION, ORDERED A TEMPORARY HALT IN ROLL ON ROLL OFF OPERATIONS AND SOUGHT TO PERSUADE THE SHIPPING COMPANIES TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE BANANA UNIONS, BRINGING A CAMPAIGN OF PERSUASION TO THE NATIONAL PRESS.

4. THE COMPANIES HELD FIRM, HOWEVER. THEY POINTED OUT THAT BECAUSE OF THE CLOSURE OF LIMON PORT TO THEM THEY HAD TO DIVERT SHIPMENTS TO PANAMA INCURRING AN ADDITIONAL EXPENSE AND THAT A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF EXPORTATION WAS SUSPENDED. (THEY STATE THAT IF THE DIVERSION VIA PANAMA HAD CONTINUED THEY WOULD HAVE HAD TO RAISE IMPORT FEES BY 20 PERCENT AND EXPORT FEES BY 10 PERCENT TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AND THE PARTICULAR EXPENSE OF MEAT, SHRIMP AND YUCA EXPORTERS.) THE COMPANIES ALSO POINTED OUT THAT THEIR UNION, THE STPFL, WAS GETTING ANXIOUS ABOUT THE LACK OF WORK AND MIGHT HAVE DECIDED TO RETALIATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BY INTERFERING WITH BANANA SHIPMENTS. PERHAPS THEIR MOST CONVINCING ARGUMENT WAS THAT THE LAW APPEARS TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE BANANA UNIONS.

5. AT ANY RATE IT APPEARS THAT THE MINISTRY OF LABOR AND THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT BACKED THE COMPANIES AND BROUGHT PRESSURE ON JAPDEVA TO NORMALIZE PORT CONDITIONS. JAPDEVA ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 13 THAT ROLL ON ROLL OFF

ACTIVITIES WOULD BE RESUMED IMMEDIATELY AND PLACATED THE
UNIONS OF PROMISING TO ISSUE GENERAL REGULATIONS GOVERN-
ING ROLL ON ROLL OFF WITHIN FIFTEEN DAYS.

6. AN INTERESTING ASIDE IS THAT IN THIS CASE THE ROLL
ON ROLL OFF UNION, THE STPFL, SEEMS TO BE COMMUNIST
LED WHEREAS THE "TROUBLE MAKERS", THE UTBA AND SFNA
ARE NOT ALIGNED WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

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